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ABSTRACT

This special issue is the final issue of "Cityschools," a magazine that reports on research regarding the transformation of urban schools and makes this research more accessible to practitioners in urban classrooms. The research is described through the stories of real educators who are finding solutions to educational problems. The focus of the special issue is achievement, one of the most important issues in urban education today. "Achievement in Urban Schools: What Makes the Difference? A Conversation with Kati Haycock" by Ann Freel discusses the findings of the Education Trust in its report "Education Watch." "Are Urban Teachers 'Ready To Teach'? Helping Teachers Meet 21st Century Challenges" by Judy Taylor with Lenaya Raack and Ann Freel considers the types of professional development that make a difference for urban teachers and urban students. "Does Governance Reform Make a Difference" is a special section that explores the history of governance reform in U.S. cities and the governance strategies that promise to make a difference. Robin La Sota, in "It's Not All about Test Scores," provides an overview of proven classroom and school-community strategies that build positive youth development. "Successful Strategies for Schools Serving At-Risk Children: An Interview with Dr. Samuel Strongfield" by Glibel Gomez and Heidi Hulse Mickelson discusses a new study by the Center on the Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University about the types of school improvement programs that make the most difference in student achievement. The issue also points out additional resources that can help the urban educator, with emphasis on electronic resources. The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory is expanding its own focus on electronic media and expects to continue to bring information on educational research to the audience of "Cityschools" though electronic resources. (SLD)

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ED 425 226

CITYSCHOOL

A Research Magazine About Urban Schools and Communities

Special Issue
Spring 1998

IN THIS ISSUE

- A Conversation With Kati Haycock
- The Future of Urban Teacher Training
- Urban Governance Reform
- School-Community Collaborations That Improve Achievement
- Successful Schoolwide Programs

Achievement in Urban Schools

What Makes the Difference?

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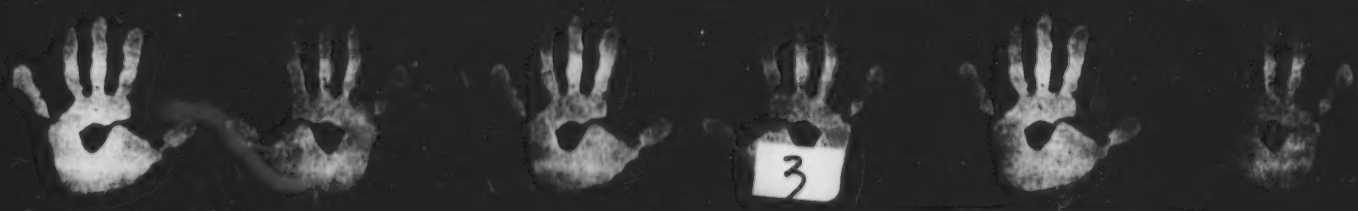

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CITYSCHOOLS

A Research Magazine About Urban Schools and Communities

Special Issue — Spring 1998

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)

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What does it take to help urban students achieve – and excel?

Photo © Paul Conklin PhotoEdit

In this special issue, CITYSCHOOLS looks at one of the most important issues in urban education today: achievement.

Research tells us much about what helps urban students achieve. Urban students can and do achieve at levels that match any school in the country. And when students underperform, a closer look reveals the barriers that are holding them back. In this issue of CITYSCHOOLS, Kati Haycock of the Education Trust shares findings from a two-year study of achievement and points to what helps and hinders urban student achievement.

National attention is also increasingly focused on the central role of the teacher in determining students' academic success. CITYSCHOOLS examines what kinds of preservice and inservice programs will best support urban teachers into the next century. We also look at the kinds of creative classroom solutions and school-community partnerships that can help students develop as whole people and achieve in all areas of life.

At the district level, policymakers continue to explore innovative governance structures to improve student achievement – particularly in underperforming schools. In an expanded section, we present an overview of the history and future of urban governance. Comprehensive school reform programs are currently another popular strategy for improving student performance in urban schools. CITYSCHOOLS speaks with researcher Sam Stringfield about which programs work best, and how schools can use such programs to make a real difference.

Finally, throughout this issue we guide you to additional resources, particularly electronic ones. Electronic resources point to the future of support for urban schools and educators. As the landscape of educational publishing has changed, CITYSCHOOLS' publisher, the North Central Regional Laboratory, has branched out into electronic media as well. NCREL's Pathways to School Improvement and other Web sites (www.ncrel.org) offer a wealth of research-based, user-friendly information for urban educators, policymakers, parents, and community members.

We remain dedicated to serving the urban audience. The flexibility, cost effectiveness, and reach of electronic media will help NCREL to continue providing educators with resources relevant to the urban context. We are glad to have served you in print form over the past three years, and we look forward to continuing to bring to your desktop the latest and best in educational research.

Lynn J. Stinnette
Editor-in-Chief

SPECIAL ISSUE
Spring 1998

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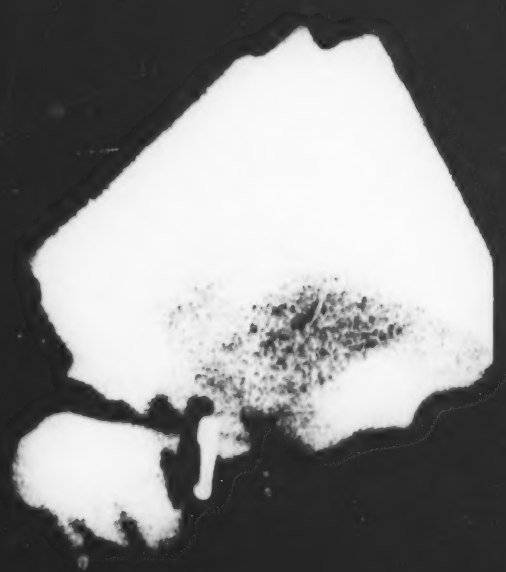
What Makes the Difference?

A Conversation With Katie Haycock of the Education Trust

By Ann Freel



With so many perspectives on achievement today, it can be hard for educators to find the core messages that will help them guide effective change. But a few strong, clear voices are leading today's conversations about how students in challenged, urban communities can learn and achieve at high levels. Kati Haycock's is one of those voices. As director of the Washington, D.C.-based Education Trust, Haycock's work for the past two years has focused on the widening achievement gap within today's student population.

In 1996, the Education Trust released a groundbreaking study, Education Watch, *that analyzed the growing achievement gap between low-income, minority students and white, middle-class students. This increasing disparity in student achievement represents an alarming trend in urban education after decades of dramatic progress in accelerating minority student achievement.*

The Education Watch *report – which examined student achievement both nationally and by state and explored the factors that contribute to the achievement gap – has become a touchstone for practitioners and policymakers looking for definitions and strategies to bridge this gap.*

In the following interview, ***CITYSCHOOLS*** *speaks with Haycock about the state of urban student achievement in our nation today.*

What is your definition of meaningful student achievement?

Meaningful student achievement is when students finish high school with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college or in the workplace. Some people would argue that not everybody ought to be prepared to go to college, but I think – and the data are pretty clear – that most students *will* go to college, so we fail to prepare them for college only at our peril.

Could you talk a little bit about the *Education Watch* findings that the gap between low-income and minority students and other students is widening after narrowing for some decades?

Between 1970 and 1988, achievement among low-income and minority students and the schools that served them improved dramatically, and the gap between those students and other students narrowed appreciably. The gap between white and black students nationally declined by one-half, and the gap between whites and Latinos – which would have been smaller to begin with – declined by one-third. Beginning in 1988, though, that progress stopped dead in its tracks. Since that time, the gap has either remained the same or in many subjects actually has begun to widen again. In most subjects and in most grade levels, the gap in 1996 was wider than in 1988.

Did you find out why?

The facts suggest that we're taking kids who enter school with less and systematically giving them less in school. We do that in three devastating ways. First, we teach different kids different things. Poor, minority kids are often separated early on from other kids, either in separate schools or on separate tracks, and are systematically taught less. They get less-rigorous curricula from elementary through high school. In high school, poor minority kids are much less likely to be placed into the college prep track and much more likely to be placed in either general or vocational tracks than are white and Asian kids. As a result, they take fewer of the more rigorous courses that lead to better performance on standardized tests and mastery of higher-level content and skills.

Second, we invest less in instructional resources, meaning teachers who are well educated in the subjects they teach and who believe kids can learn, and in instructional materials and equipment, like textbooks and science equipment.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

Pathways Critical Issue: "Creating High-Achieving Learning Environments":
www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/leadrshp/le400.htm

The National Center for Educational Statistics:
www.nces.ed.gov

Mid-Central Regional Educational Laboratory's Compendium of K-12 Standards:
www.mcrel.org/standards/benchmarks

"Quality Counts '98: The Urban Challenge." A special report from Education Week and the Pew Charatable Trusts (January 8, 1998). Available via:
www.edweek.org

In 1991, 40 percent of high school mathematics courses in high-poverty schools were taught by teachers with no formal expertise in this field.

Source: Education Watch, 1996.

Third and most devastating, we expect more of some kids than we do of others. My staff have been stunned by how little kids in urban schools are asked to do – how few assignments they get and the low level of those assignments. For example, in urban middle schools, students get more coloring assignments than writing and mathematics assignments. They also get As for work that would earn a C or a D in the suburbs. The national data on that are very clear – whether in language arts or in math or in science.

How high should urban educators' expectations be, and what are the consequences of high expectations in an environment where kids have not always had access to a high level of instruction?

The consequences of having less than the highest expectations is kids achieving at nowhere near the level they're capable of. But when you talk about setting the same standards for all kids, there is always a backlash from those who say, "Wait a second. That may be fine for some kids, but it's not fine for our urban kids." They argue that you're raising the bar for kids who can't even make it over the current bar.

I reject that argument with every ounce of my being, because we see schools all over the country that are expecting high achievement from poor and minority kids and are getting it. There are just too many high-poverty schools where the kids are knocking the top off of the state's exam, so I can't believe that poverty or neighborhood violence or single parent homes – or any other excuses – are the real culprits. I think the real culprit is low expectations.

Can you give an example of such a school and talk about the strategies they used?

One example is Mission, Texas, which is an extremely high-poverty school district not far from the Mexican border. Virtually every school has a pass rate on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in the 93-95 percentile, at a time when the statewide average is down a percent and the state average for other high-poverty schools is in the 50s.

In districts like Mission, you see a relentlessness that you don't see in other schools – a conviction that nothing in these kids' backgrounds or daily life makes it impossible for them to achieve the standards of the TAAS. You don't necessarily see the constructivist, newfangled teaching that many educational reformers espouse.

You also see that the school day is considerably longer than it is in many schools, from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The district acknowledges that these kids require more time and more help, so instead of using Title I and other resources to do pull-outs – replacing time with other time – they use these resources to have more time.

Has leadership come from the district level, from a few principals, or from another source?

It's a combination. In El Paso in 1992 they created the El Paso Collaborative: the three major school districts, the University of Texas-El Paso, and some community-based organizations. They created a structure to do citywide planning and to agree on standards, which the university reinforced by bringing its admission requirements into alignment with those standards.

Most important, they created structures to help principals meet every month to talk and to help one another with problems. They have 45 spectacularly good teachers across the three districts who serve as mentors to their peers and help them implement better classroom practices. In the summer, school teams come together to chart their progress and plan for the next year.

What kind of measures – in this district or others – are educators using?

The primary measure tends to be the TAAS. At the high school level, where the TAAS does not go high enough, they're looking at indications such as completion of courses like algebra, geometry, trigonometry, chemistry, and physics. They're always looking at their data to try to figure out what's wrong.

In schools that are showing real gains, the principals and teachers look at data all the time. It is hanging on the walls. People are talking about it. The teachers get monthly printouts. But in schools that are really stuck, you don't see any data. I find that very interesting.

So educators have the time to talk about data and the technology to make it understandable?

A lot of that technology really is the principal or a couple of teachers sitting down with very complex reports from the state, then breaking them down into more understandable units of information.

Texas has a statewide accountability system that demands progress among all subgroups in the school. An exemplary school in Texas must have 90 percent of its kids pass the TAAS, but that means 90 percent of white kids, Latino kids, black kids, and poor kids. The message is that you can't leave anybody behind. It's the one state we found where the gap between minorities and whites is declining, not just on the TAAS, but also on the National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP].

Over half of all students are not enrolled in college-preparatory curriculum. The problem is worse for minority and low-income students; only one in four is placed in the college prep course sequence.

Source:
Education Watch, 1996.

Nationally:

- 88 percent of white students graduate high school; 25 percent graduate college
- 83 percent of African American students graduate high school; 12 percent graduate college
- 60 percent of Latino students graduate high school; 10 percent graduate college

Source: Education Watch, 1996

How have schools like Mission and El Paso addressed bilingual concerns in their schools?

In the lower grades, TAAS is administered in Spanish. In a place like Mission, virtually all of the students arrive at school knowing only a few words of English. But by the fourth grade, most are taking the TAAS in English. By making this a priority, the school gets spectacular results. Very few fourth graders are exempted for any language reasons.

Could you describe some strategies for continuous teacher development and how they differ from traditional strategies?

Once you make a commitment to a standards-based approach, you have to acknowledge that teachers need extraordinary amounts of help. Teachers and principals need to be deeply involved in selecting and adopting appropriate standards, even if that means adopting a state's standards or a national standard. It is fundamentally important for teachers to be involved in these discussions and to talk with higher education faculty, business people, and others about what's important for kids. Communities that don't go through that process really miss out on an important opportunity.

Once the standards have been adopted, teachers and principals need help implementing them. Teachers need more than a two-hour workshop, which is barely enough time to read through the standards. The standards are not supposed to be just a list of content, but what kids should actually be able to do. Teachers need to compare the curriculum they're using and the work they're assigning to the standards.

We worked with three cities – El Paso, Philadelphia, and Pueblo, Colorado – to design a process to bring teachers together once a week for three hours. Each week, one teacher brings in a class assignment from the previous week along with the students' work. Together, the teachers – and often parents and the principal – evaluate the students' work against a standard. They ask, "Does it meet the standard? If not, how can we change the assignment or instruction to help students meet the standard?" This kind of dialogue is critically important for helping teachers teach to high standards.

Similarly, teachers have a critical need for new curricula that meet the standards. Many reformer assumed that once the standards were in place, teachers would create their own curriculum to match these standards. Many teachers aren't inclined to do it; others don't have the background to do it. What's needed are replacement units or a full replacement curriculum, because putting high standards on top of a low-level curriculum is not going to work.

Is the higher education connection important for helping students achieve college-level standards and giving teachers adequate preparation and support?

It's an important link for the problem of inadequate content knowledge. Most teachers had sufficient content knowledge to teach in the old system, where it was okay if only 10 or 20 percent of your kids got it. Once you decide that at least 95 percent of your kids need to get it, your teachers need to know the subject much more deeply. These communities are trying to find ways to help teachers deepen their content knowledge quickly.

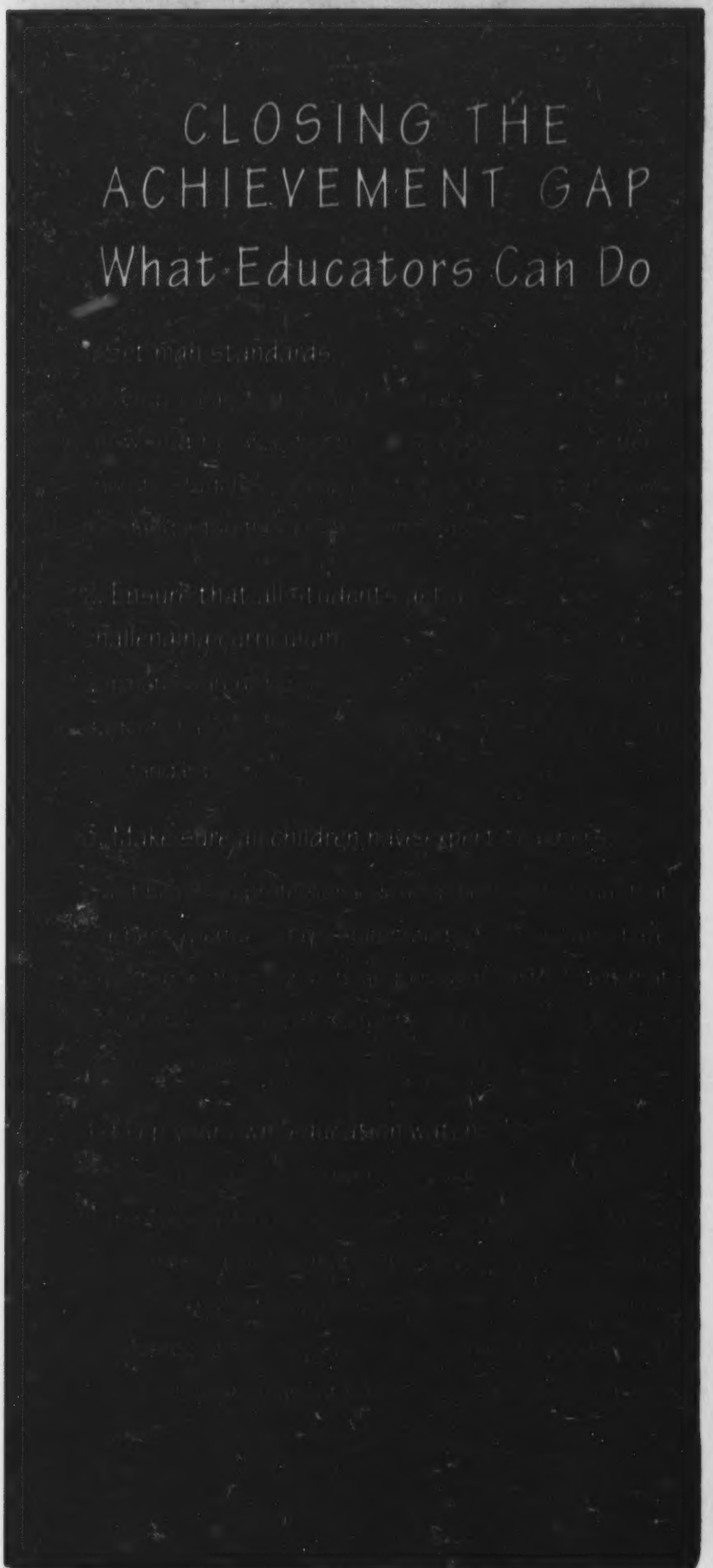
But you have to look at another side of this issue, too. Higher education is turning out teachers who don't have adequate content knowledge or teaching skills. We need to ask, "What standards should we set for teachers? How can we change education courses so that we are producing teachers who are prepared to teach *all* kids to high standards, especially in urban settings."

What do you think is most promising about student achievement, and what might stall our progress toward helping urban students achieve at very high levels?

The most promising step has been recognizing the need to teach all youngsters to the same high standards. Most worrisome is the belief that we can't do it without more resources. Some districts feel that they can't possibly set and achieve high standards with the current resource base. That's a troubling issue for all of us at the Education Trust, because some districts have far less than others and many of those districts have kids who need more than others. We say you can't wait, no matter what kind of resources you have. Waiting does nobody any good – certainly not the kids. It may make our lives as educators easier, but it does a great disservice to the kids we are trying to serve. It postpones the quality education that they need. The truth is that we can do better with what we have.

Kati Haycock is executive director of the not-for-profit Education Trust, a national research and policy organization dedicated to improving the quality of education at all levels. Haycock writes and speaks frequently on educational issues, both as a scholar and as an advocate for children.

For more information on the Education Trust or to receive a copy of the Education Watch *report, call the Education Trust at (202) 293-1217 or visit their Web site at www.edtrust.org.*



Are Urban Teachers "Ready to Teach"?

Helping Teachers Meet 21st-Century Challenges

Nothing in my teacher-training program prepared me for working with students who read well below grade level and who lacked self-esteem, discipline, and respect for authority. No one at the university or in my school provided me with a clue on how to obtain basic teaching resources, deal with classroom management, and interact with unresponsive students, parents, and fellow staff members.

And nothing in my middle-class upbringing equipped me for working with children who came to school angry or fearful because of acts of violence in their homes or on the streets, who came to school exhausted because they had no beds or shared them with many others, who were hungry because they were not fed, or who never left their neighborhoods to visit the many cultural resources in Chicago.

—former teacher Bart Gallegos,
from *The American School Board Journal*

Every school year, newsletters and pamphlets, teachers and principals, politicians and public service announcements urge parents to immunize their children, see that they get enough sleep and a nutritious breakfast, check their homework, and read with them. The message to parents is clear: Send your children to school ready to learn.

But what about the message to teachers – particularly urban school teachers? Are they receiving the support and preparation they need to teach effectively? What critical skills, strategies, and beliefs do they need to succeed in the 21st-century urban classroom, and how are our institutions building these capacities? Are teachers prepared for the realities of teaching in urban schools? In short, are new teachers being sent to the urban classroom ready to teach?

Dr. Beverly J. Buchanan

To answer these questions, researchers are identifying and exploring the strategies that successful urban teachers use to make learning more challenging and meaningful for urban students. These strategies include teaching culturally diverse students using culturally relevant materials, mixing basic and problem-solving skills to teach for meaning, engaging students in learning, using technology to support learning, and, above all, sincerely believing that all children can learn.

Training Teachers for Urban Schools

Professor Martin Haberman of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee argues that teachers' beliefs guide their behavior. A teacher who *believes* that all children can learn will discover, develop, and refine the most effective strategies and skills to nurture every child's potential to learn. To the successful urban teacher, no child is beyond reach.

The first step toward believing in urban students is to respect them, suggests Professor Geneva Gay, a leader in teacher preparation at the University of Washington-Seattle. Respect is crucial to establishing a positive learning environment in any school, Gay asserts, but it is doubly important in urban classrooms, where teachers and students often come from different ethnic and racial backgrounds and social classes. Gay points out that a growing percentage of today's students are poor and live in urban communities, while a growing percentage of their teachers are in the middle class and live in small- to medium-size suburban communities. When teachers focus on these differences and perceive differences to be negative, they fail to develop or use culturally sensitive curricula or instructional practices that affirm and capitalize on students' strengths.

Gay offers a bold strategy for helping teachers develop respect for students' cultural diversity. She believes that student teachers should be guided through carefully planned, authentic learning experiences that provide a rich understanding of diverse cultures and cultural systems. Student teachers should learn to become cultural brokers and to use cultural contexts in teaching. That is, teachers should be able to affirm students' cultural diversity, build bridges across different cultural systems, and create supportive classroom climates that foster pluralism and support the highest levels of academic achievement.

Preparation for teaching in multicultural settings is no longer optional, says Gay. Fully 87 percent of the students in the Council of Great City Schools' 47 school districts, which represents the largest urban school districts in the nation, are either African American, Latino, or Asian/Pacific Islander – and their numbers are growing, according to The Urban Institute. In contrast, only 13 percent of teachers are African American, Latino, or Asian/Pacific Islander – and their numbers are decreasing, according to the 1992 report, *Status of the American School Teacher*. Indeed, researchers Jones and Sandidge expect that by the turn of the century only 5 percent of all teachers will belong to an ethnic or racial minority.

Dr. Beverly J. Buchanan, the principal at Maat Imhotep Technical Academy in Detroit, Michigan (one of the state's largest elementary schools, with 1,200 students), agrees with Gay. "You simply

cannot be an effective teacher if you do not have the capacity, desire, and will to understand your students, build on their cultural and personal strengths, and engage them in learning," Dr. Buchanan says. "Schools of education can give you some tools for working with low-income and minority children and the opportunity to test those tools in urban classrooms, but the will to learn from such opportunities, to invest yourself personally in the development of every child's potential – that comes from within."

Susan Manikowski, coordinator of staff development in the Robbinsdale, Minnesota, School District, says that professional development in her district is tailored to prepare teachers to succeed in today's classrooms. "We realize that the methods classes at most state and private colleges are not changing to meet the needs of children," Manikowski explains. In Robbinsdale, new teachers must take two courses a year during their two- to three-year probationary period. They can take courses in cooperative learning, multiple intelligence, classroom management, learning styles, and performance assessment. "We offer a menu of professional development opportunities to our teachers, including a strong mentorship program, a battery of classes aimed at supporting the new teacher, and a learning community model that links schools with institutions of higher education," Manikowski says.

Linda Delgadillo, director of the Milwaukee Teacher Education Center (MTEC), strongly supports the mentorship model of professional development. "Our message is teachers teaching teachers," says Delgadillo. After an intensive summer training program, each participant is matched with a mentor from the Center's faculty. MTEC's mentors are mixed along gender, racial, and ethnic lines to reflect the diversity of Milwaukee's teachers and students and respond to their needs. The mentor demonstrates techniques and strategies in the new teacher's classroom. Participants may receive this kind of intensive, personalized training for three years.

Professor Haberman believes that mentoring not only provides powerful support for new teachers, but also helps curb the high turnover rate among urban teachers. According to Haberman, about half of all traditionally trained teachers in urban schools either quit or fail during their first five years on the job, while other researchers have found that alternatively certified teachers are more willing to work in urban schools and stay on the job longer.

Some researchers doubt whether alternative certification programs measure up to the rigorous performance standards of traditional programs. But both Manikowski and Buchanan have found alternatively certified teachers to be as solid in the classroom as traditionally trained teachers. Moreover, alternative certification programs recruit significantly more minorities than traditional programs, according to resarchers Jones and Sandidge.

Mentoring provides powerful support for new teachers, and helps curb teacher turnover.

Critical Skills, Strategies, and Resources for Effective Teaching

Clearly it is important to train, recruit, and retain teachers who are prepared for the challenges of the urban classroom, who come from diverse backgrounds, who are comfortable using culturally relevant materials, and who respect student differences. But these qualities alone are not enough to ensure success in the urban classroom. Teachers also must be equipped with specific skills, strategies, and resources to be effective in urban schools.

One instructional strategy that supports achievement among urban youth is teaching *both* basic and problem-solving skills. While many educators and parents have championed a return to basic skills instruction (particularly low-income, urban students), there is little evidence that a return to basic skills alone will improve student achievement. Even the mastery of basic skills cannot ensure success in the real world. Colleges and the job market demand critical thinking and problem-solving skills as well as basic reading.

Linda Delgadillo

writing, and computation skills. The 1993 Commission on Chapter 1 report concludes that students will need to master both critical thinking and basic skills if they are to participate meaningfully in the 21st century.

Education researchers Knapp, Shields, and Turnbull argue that the effective urban school teacher combines basic skills instruction with challenging content to develop students' problem-solving skills and their ability to obtain meaning from content. Their research indicates that some teachers do blend basic skills with "meaning-oriented" instruction, but such teachers are rare and may lack the depth and capacity to use this approach in all subjects.

Knapp and his colleagues are careful to say, however, that teachers should not abandon basic skills instruction in favor of meaning-oriented instruction. Sometimes drill and basic skills instruction are appropriate strategies. Teachers themselves (perhaps with support from master teachers and consultants) must determine when to use meaning-oriented instruction and when to stick with basic skills instruction.

Knapp and his colleagues also point out that mastery of basic skills is not a prerequisite for tackling problem-solving activities. The theory that children cannot handle "higher" content until they have mastered basic skills is ill founded, they argue. Through "watered-down curriculum" and tracking, this theory has barred large segments of poor and minority children from exposure to challenging material, according to the Commission on Chapter 1. A child who has not mastered the multiplication tables may still master algebra, for example, because very different skills are used in these two areas.

In addition to problem-solving instruction, successful urban teachers need to establish more engaging and enabling classroom environments, say Knapp, Shields, and Turnbull. Urban teachers typically have larger than average class sizes, so maintaining order is an important priority. But Knapp and his colleagues suggest that what may

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

"A Teacher's Guide to the U.S. Department of Education": www.ed.gov/pubs/TeachersGuide

The National Association for Bilingual Education: www.nabe.org

Black Teachers on Teaching, by Michele Foster, published by The New Press (1997) Available via: www.wwnorton.com/newpress

look like disorder – cooperative learning, vocal activity, and energetic expression – actually supports meaningful and engaged learning.

Another critical skill for the 21st-century urban teacher is the ability to integrate technology into the classroom. Most teachers, however, have not been trained in this skill. Moreover, urban teachers often do not have the support they need to study, test, and experiment with technology. According to a report by the U.S. Department of Education, teachers need "hands-on learning, time to experiment, easy access to equipment, and ready access to support personnel who can help them understand how to use technology to support learning." But as Dr. Buchanan points out, "Mainly because of the competing demands on their time, urban teachers seldom have the opportunity to test the technology and see how it can support their instruction. There's a real learning curve for teachers attempting to integrate technology and instruction successfully and meaningfully."

Yet Buchanan remains optimistic about integrating technology into the urban classroom. "As an urban principal, I see great investment at the district, building, and classroom levels in making technology work for urban teachers and students," Buchanan says. "But we can't isolate the technology. The real test is to use technology to improve instruction and learning."

The same might be said of teachers themselves: We cannot isolate teacher training from urban reality. The real test of teacher preparation and support systems is how well teachers function in the classroom and whether all students learn to their highest potential. Successful urban teachers need to master new approaches to teaching and learning, respect and connect with students from diverse backgrounds, sincerely believe that every child can learn, create an engaged learning environment for all students, and integrate technology into the classroom. In the 21st-century urban classroom, these skills, strategies, and beliefs will determine whether a teacher has indeed come to school "ready to teach."

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

Pathways' Critical Issues on Preservice Education and Professional Development:
www.ncrel.org/pathways.htm

National Center for Research on Teacher Learning:
http://ncrtl.msu.edu

21st Century Teacher's Network:
www.21ct.org

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Make a Difference?

Governance Reform:

A National Overview

By Gail L. Sunderman

Governance reform is a strategy that many states and school districts have adopted to improve schools. Over the past 20 years, two approaches to reform have prevailed: centralization and decentralization. In decentralized arrangements, school districts give parents, community representatives, teachers, and principals a role in school policymaking. More recent reforms have favored centralized authority in which the city's mayor or even the state may take control of the schools or schools and districts may be reconstituted. The underlying assumption of both strategies is that changes in how schools are governed will lead to improvements in teaching and learning.

Decentralized reform typically attempts to include previously excluded groups in school governance in order to make schools more responsive to their constituents and more receptive to innovation. The two major types of decentralized governance that cities have employed are administrative decentralization (principal-professional centered) and parent empowerment. Under administrative decentralization, the principal and teachers enjoy extensive autonomy from central bureaucratic direction, and parents play only a formal, advisory role. Parent empowerment, on the other hand, gives parents legitimate control over school decisions, such as approving the budget, hiring the principal, and determining curricular matters.

Often the purpose of centralized governance is to increase accountability and reduce competing authorities to achieve systemwide policy goals. Reformers may invoke centralized authority to restore or monitor the financial stability of faltering school districts or even to improve academic performance.

From Decentralized to Centralized Models

Decentralization as a reform strategy is not new. It dates back to an experiment in New York City that began in 1970. Like other cities, New York had experienced an influx of poor blacks and Hispanics and a corresponding exodus of middle-class whites in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Leaders of these minority groups regarded the school's central bureaucracy as unresponsive to the needs of the growing minority populations and unwilling to improve the quality of education. Decentralization was considered a strategy to rectify that situation and, at the same time, increase the number of minorities on school faculties. Responding to these concerns, the New York state legislature passed the Decentralization Act of 1969, which established community-based school districts beginning in 1970.

More recent decentralization efforts began in the 1980s when large urban districts like Chicago, Houston, and Miami (Dade County) started implementing site-based management. By 1990, seven of the eight largest school districts in the United States had adopted some form of school-based management. Many of these efforts stemmed from the 1983 release of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. This report argued that schools were failing to educate American youth adequately and called for nationwide reform of the school system. Among other reform strategies, the report specifically advocated deregulation and decentralization.

In Chicago, the Illinois legislature, education reform groups, and the business community led the drive for local empowerment. Local School Councils (LSCs), each comprising six parents, two teachers, and the school principal, were established

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

Pathways' Critical Issues in Governance:
http://www.ncrel.org/pathways.htm

Education Commission of the States:
www.ecs.org

Make a Difference?

in 1988 in all 530 Chicago public schools. The LSCs were given authority to set school policy and make key educational decisions, including budget decisions.

In other cities, the push toward reform came from within the district, often from the superintendent or teachers' union. Not surprisingly, these efforts led to administrative decentralization, giving teachers and principals a greater role in decision making. As part of the 1988 collective bargaining agreement in Dade County, Florida, the union and district created a pilot program known as School-Based Management/Shared Decision Making (SBM/SDM). This program established SBM/SDM councils, comprising an equal number of teachers and administrators, that are accountable to the district. Local decision making in Los Angeles also arose through union contract negotiations. Teachers have a dominant role in the schools' governing councils; half of the seats are reserved for teachers and the remaining half are divided among parents, community members, the school principal, and a nonteaching school employee.

These reforms have had mixed results, and by the 1990s dissatisfaction with decentralization led to efforts to change school governance arrangements once again. Chicago's public schools continued to perform poorly after seven years of parental empowerment. The level of parent involvement had dropped, the district continued to experience budgetary crises, and public confidence in the system was low.

The Republican controlled state legislature, with the support of the mayor of Chicago, the business community, and the governor of Illinois, passed the Chicago School Reform Amendatory Act (1995). The Act expanded the authority of the board and central administration and strengthened the administration by linking it to the board and the mayor. Most important, the law expanded the financial powers of the board and enhanced the authority of the board and CEO by transferring authority from other administrative layers to the central office. The law also expanded the CEO's authority to identify and intervene in poorly performing schools and streamlined the procedure for placing schools on remediation.

In a move patterned after Chicago's reforms, the Ohio legislature recently authorized the mayor of Cleveland to appoint the top administrator and school board members. This move came two years after the state took over the school system. In 1995, a federal court judge – citing a lack of leadership, management problems, and a crippling budget deficit – ordered the Ohio state schools chief to take control of the district's fiscal and personnel operations, to administer its educational programs, and to submit interim and long-range reorganization plans. Under state control, the district restructured $150 million in debt and passed a levy estimated to generate $67 million a year for the school system. Business and religious leaders in Cleveland, Republican lawmakers, and the mayor of Cleveland supported the new legislation as a way to address the school system's academic and financial problems.

In Maryland, the state has assumed unprecedented authority to manage the Baltimore public schools in return for increased state aid to the school district. The legislation responded to long-standing financial problems in the Baltimore district and declines in student performance as the system served an increasingly impoverished population. States also have taken over local school districts in Cleveland, Ohio; Compton, California; East St. Louis, Illinois; Letcher County, Kentucky; Logan County, West Virginia; Jersey City, Newark, and Paterson, New Jersey; Roosevelt, New York; and other areas.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

The Consortium on Policy Research in Education:

www.upenn.edu/gse/cpre

Financing Schools for High Performance: Strategies for Improving the Use of Educational Resources, by Allan Odden and Carolyn Busch, 1998. Available via:

www.josseybass.com

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Consequences and Lessons

State takeovers have improved school management and curricula, but there is little evidence that they have improved educational achievement. Governance reform has been largely disconnected from what students learn and has generally failed to alter classroom practices. Indeed, research suggests that basic patterns of instruction have changed remarkably little over long periods of time – regardless of whether districts are centralized or decentralized.

Underlying many governance reform efforts today is the assumption that schools exist to develop students' economic competitiveness, most often measured by standardized tests. This vision contrasts sharply with that of earlier periods in the nation's history, when the central function of schools was to prepare students for citizenship in the American democracy, for example. As school reform has become defined by achievement scores, such alternative visions of student success have often been shoved aside.

Moreover, governance reform efforts have increased, rather than decreased, the complexity of school systems. For example, in Chicago, the Illinois state legislature adopted three major pieces of reform legislation within ten years: (1) state-directed accountability in 1985, which made the school district more accountable to the state, (2) parent empowerment in 1988, and (3) a business management model in 1995. Each law grew out of a different vision of school reform, and all three are still in operation in Chicago.

To the extent that school governance reform is being dominated by state-level policymakers rather than local schools and teachers, it is also being guided by the political process rather than educational practice. State lawmakers often take positions with an eye toward party politics, district priorities, political ideology, interest group support, coalition membership, and, of course, the next election. These positions may or may not have anything to do with teaching and learning, and the inevitable result is that noneducational battles are fought in the educational arena.

Gail Sunderman is a senior policy analyst with the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. Her work focuses on governance reform and school improvement in urban contexts.

Where Do We Go From Here? Lessons From the Last 20 Years

Even the most successful school governance reforms clearly are not enough to make significant improvements in teaching and learning. The business of public schools – educating students – cannot improve until certain challenges are addressed. First, school governance reform must devote more attention to the appropriate functions and responsibilities of each level of the school system. The central administration can perform bureaucratic and management functions, such as purchasing, hiring, scheduling, record keeping, transportation, and the budget process. The state government has a legitimate role in monitoring student performance, certifying teachers, and enforcing fiscal accountability. But local schools and teachers are the best equipped to modify their instructional strategies to meet the needs of individual students.

Second, teachers and principals need better access to information on developments in curriculum, instruction, and school organization. Schools exist to provide instruction, yet new instructional strategies often do not reach those who could use them in the classroom.

Third, teacher training must be ongoing. Teachers are the people who put policies into practice in the classroom. The teacher's choice of curriculum, instruction, and evaluation largely determines the learning opportunities available to students. District-supported teacher training should address core areas of instruction, assessment, student learning, and classroom management in order to improve teaching practice and student outcomes.

Fourth, school governance reform assumes that altering the authority structure in the schools will improve education. But such a simple solution is inadequate. It ignores the underlying problems facing most large urban districts - concentrated poverty and racial segregation. Metropolitan districts such as Los Angeles and Chicago that are highly segregated by income and race reveal a strong connection between poverty and low achievement. Our city schools require much broader, more comprehensive change to address the problems that more and more urban school children face every day.

Choice and Contracting:

A New Option

Today, schools hire outside contractors to provide everything from cafeteria services to office supplies to security. But a new model for school governance reform would hire for-profit companies to run the schools themselves. Paul T. Hill, director of the University of Washington Graduate School of Public Affairs, proposes that states or school districts contract with private, for-profit organizations to operate individual schools or even entire school districts. In the book, *New Schools for a New Century: The Redesign of Urban Education,* Hill argues that contracting would "provide new options for teachers and others who want the freedom to run effective public schools and for school board members and other public officials who want to find ways to support effective schools."

Contracting with for-profit companies to run a school or district may sound similar to the more popular charter schools concept, under which the state or school district issues a "charter" to an organization or group of individuals to establish and operate a school. But contracting works *within* the existing public school system, rather than circumventing it.

Under a contract arrangement, the school board would be responsible for curriculum, staff development, and funding. The board would retain the authority to set policy on academic standards, ensure accountability, and evaluate the contractor's work. Meanwhile, the school district could concentrate on establishing policy, while leaving the details of managing school budgets, hiring and firing staff, and resolving related issues to the contractor.

A contractor could be any qualified organization that meets the requirements set by the school board and the state, such as teachers' unions and other organizations with an educational focus. Contractors would be free to create their own learning environments, control their finances, and establish the curriculum of the school or district.

The community also has a role to play. Each community could define its own governance structure, curriculum, and performance standards. Community members, parents, teachers, and other concerned parties also could participate as members of the local school board.

Supporters of contracting believe that schools will improve teaching and learning once they are disentangled from the constraints of bureaucratic micro-management and political influence. They also argue that private, for-profit organizations will be more efficient and cost-effective than public schools in the delivery of educational services. Introducing competition into public education will both reduce costs and increase student performance. If parents can choose where to send their children to school, they will select the school that has the educational approach and curriculum

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

Pathways' Charter Schools Resources:
www.ncrel.org/sdrs/timely.htm

University of Washington's Center on Reinventing Public Education:
www.gse.washington.edu/pages/crpe/home.html

National Public Radio's "Weekend Edition Saturday" story on for-profit educational contracting:
www.npr.org/ramfeed/weekend_edition/19990227.we_19990227.ram

Does Performance Reform

that will work best for their children. Hill argues that each school should receive funding based on the number of enrolled pupils. The more students the school attracts, the more funding the contractor and the school would receive. This free market approach, he suggests, will make schools more accountable for producing positive results. Only the most effective schools will attract parents and students, and only the most efficient will thrive.

Both Baltimore, Maryland, and Dade County, Florida, recently contracted with Education Alternatives Incorporated (EAI). When Baltimore's mayor and school board hired EAI, they agreed that EAI's performance evaluation would be based on student test scores, attendance rates, parental satisfaction, and other criteria. EAI's own measurements of student learning indicated that students had made progress under EAI. However, students in inner-city schools under EAI did not perform as expected on the tests used by all other Baltimore schools. Hill attributes the failure of EAI in Baltimore to opposition from the Baltimore Federation of Teachers. The teachers' union gained media attention by pointing out the loopholes in the contract and the contractor's failure to improve student test scores.

Dade County's decision to hire EAI to run one school was far less contentious, perhaps because the United Teachers of Dade participated in the decision. Nonetheless, Dade County did not renew its contract with EAI, saying that it could now run the school itself.

The experiences of these two communities and others have provided Hill with lessons for the future. Recognizing the complications of changing school governance, Hill recommends that the power of each participant – especially decision-making authority – must be clearly defined. The contract should spell out what decisions will be made by the school board what decisions are under the contractor's jurisdiction. How contractors will be held accountable for poor performance and rewarded for good performance must be detailed in the contract.

The legal status of contracting for public education must be examined in some states. Generally, the responsibility for public education is delegated to the state, which then delegates that responsibility to the school boards. Some states legislate that public education cannot be delegated further, and therefore contracting is impermissible. Collective bargaining agreements also may constrain contractors' independence.

According to Hill, contracting is a popular idea with many political leaders who are unhappy with the state of public education, particularly in urban schools. Nonetheless, contracting is a largely untested idea, and its results may or may not live up to its supporters' claims. Indeed, critics question whether contract schools can achieve a sufficient level of parent involvement, whether competition will truly improve educational services, and whether a high-profile service using significant public funds can ever be de-politicized.

Reported by Gilbel Gomez

The Teacher's Role in School Governance: What Works?

There are many kinds of local school governance. In some schools, the principal makes key decisions with a school advisory board. In other cases, the principal and a small group of teachers, parents, and community members make policy decisions through a formal school council or governing board. Yet another possibility is that teachers make policy decisions about schoolwide or curricular/instructional issues in teams, organized by grade level, subject area, or mixed grades/subjects.

Which kind of governance is best for teachers and students? Both teachers and educational researchers claim that broad-based shared decision making:

- Enhances communication among teachers and between administrators and teachers
- Improves attitudes toward work (e.g., more satisfaction, less alienation, greater sense of responsibility and accountability)
- Facilitates implementation of school improvement decisions
- Improves the quality of the educational decision-making process

In a three-year study, University of Illinois researcher Mark Smylie found that although the development of shared decision-making practices in schools and their results are not uniform, teacher participation in school-based decisions can be related positively to instructional improvement and to student success. The key factors are increased accountability, the presence of learning opportunities for teachers, and increased collaboration among teachers. Smylie found that high-functioning, collaborative decision-making processes were characterized by:

- Frequent, regular, and inclusive teacher participation and shared leadership between principals and teachers
- Collaborative and consensus-driven decision making
- A focus on school mission, curriculum and instruction, teacher staff development, and management issues

Without the needed support, tools, and climate for collaborative decision making, Smylie found, teachers find the process distracting and detrimental to improving student achievement. Distractions can stem from teachers' work overload, role conflicts, tensions with other teachers and administrators, time required for non-instructional matters, and lack of trust.

Smylie's research also indicates that support from the district is vital if broad-based, shared decision making is to improve student outcomes. Needed support includes district and school-based systems for goal setting, political and technical support, a press toward accountability, and professional development opportunities. Districtwide policies to support decentralized decision making are a strong catalyst for increasing teacher leadership in school governance. It is equally important for the school district and individual schools to establish a climate of stability and trust that fosters the ability to work through early failure and resolve conflict.

In *New Schools for a New Century*, researchers Wohlstetter, Mohrman, and Robertson report that it is not enough to transfer power from the district to the school. They offer the following eight recommendations for the whole school community:

- Empower administrators, teachers, parents, and others by organizing teams or work groups that facilitate widespread involvement.
- Invest in ongoing professional development to strengthen both individual and organizational capacity to achieve reform.
- Get access to a wide variety of information on student, staff, and school performance: use the information to guide decision making and provide feedback to school constituents.
- Design an incentive system that motivates involvement in the reform process and rewards school staff for producing results, especially student achievement.
- Create a shared vision for boosting student achievement that guides reform efforts.
- Promote shared leadership by encouraging teachers to lead work teams and by allowing principals to focus on change and creating a learning community.
- Ensure adequate resources by cultivating external funding and by linking the school to community organizations and professional networks.
- Refocus the central office to enable and support school-level reform efforts.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

AFT's and NEA's Web sites:

"The Role of Leadership in Sustaining School Reform: Voices From the Field":

ERIC Clearinghouse on Education's Urban Education Web:

Reported by Robin LaSota

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Tales from Two Cities:

Los Angeles and Chicago

Los Angeles and Chicago are two urban districts whose stories illustrate the strengths and challenges of governance reform. Five years ago, LA County Unified District moved toward decentralization by establishing community-based school "clusters," each served by locally-based cluster staff. In the three years since the Chicago Public Schools have been managed by City Hall, Chicago schools have experienced tighter centralized accountability – yet Local School Councils (LSCs) have preserved a measure of active parent and community governance at the school level.

CITYSCHOOLS spoke with school-level educators from both these cities, who candidly shared their perspectives on their districts' current governance efforts: what's worked, what hasn't, and what their districts should do next to better support local schools.

What about your district's governance reform has been most helpful to you at the school level?

LOS ANGELES: The cluster concept is aimed at being more responsive to school needs and family needs. You know the community and you're able to respond to what principals would like. If [principals] need me, I'm only 10 minutes away. - *Cluster administrator*

We have a [cluster] evaluator available to work with our school. Now our strategic planning is more data-driven and tied to state standards. With the help of the cluster staff and our evaluator, we designed rubrics for assessing student work – particularly writing – using the state standards. They taught us how to score with the rubric and [interpret the results] by grade level. It's hard for educators to use data and actually see if you're getting results. We've done two work samples and we've had incredible progress in student writing. Without the support of the cluster staff, it would have taken two years instead of seven months. - *Principal*

The cluster program brings presenters to our school, and they come into our classrooms and advise us on instruction. The cluster staff is available to look at programs, they collaborate and share. The process has opened up money, substitute-teacher days, and training. - *Teacher*

In our cluster, all schools adopted the same reading book, which helps transfer students who generally stay in the same cluster when they move. Our schools also adopted a similar instructional and leadership focus on policies with regard to social promotion, retention, and other things. - *Cluster administrator*

CHICAGO: We've had several years of knowing that we have our job security, which is good. The accountability strand is [also] long overdue. The accountability has caused people to sit up and examine what they are doing and why they are doing it. I hope that the Mayor is in it for the long-term rather than the short term. - *Principal*

The most useful [district accomplishment] in Chicago has been academic standards. We were having trouble trying to align state and local standards ourselves. - *Principal*

One of the biggest advantages to the Local School Councils is better communication with parents. We have a group of parents who read up on policies and curriculum. Parents go back and advise other parents on policy and curriculum. Teachers and parents work together to act as liaisons to the

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

National Center for Urban Partnerships:
www.ncup.org
(click on Discussion Forum)

whole community. As a teacher I hear staffs' concerns and then I bring that to LSC meetings. - *Teacher*

I think we are aware of the accountability that comes with Mayor's office. I see an increased focus on test scores. The teachers are concerned about improving those scores because it is a reflection of how we are perceived. There is added pressure for some schools which [I think] is for the better. - *Teacher*

What hasn't worked so well?

LOS ANGELES: *Our* school has a wonderful motivating cluster leader and she knows instruction – but not all [cluster leaders] do. That would make a big difference. Cluster administrators [need to keep] the bureaucratic barriers away from schools. - *School principal*

Time is a challenge. Five years ago, we started from scratch. I had to get to know the parents, teachers, schools, as well as the administrators. Itis like building a whole city from scratch. - *Cluster administrator*

CHICAGO: The one negative is more centralization of curriculum. Schools that are achieving should have a little more latitude. They should be able to develop curriculum to be reflective of our school and our communities. - *Principal*

The drawback of the Local School Council process is that it is very time-consuming. The LSC adds extra meeting time and preparation time. Work has increased from 50%-75% from what it was. I have friends in schools where the LSC is very factional. In some schools, the LSC is not a positive force because of people's personalities or agendas. - *Principal*

One of the challenges with the LSC is helping parents understand how we evaluate children with regard to the curriculum. We're trying to give parents a little training on teaching process, the grading process, and Chicago's standards. - *Teacher*

What could your district do next to help you more?

LOS ANGELES: We're tired and overwhelmed because it's a lot of work. Yet everything informs us about what to change, [the] data informs us, and that's something we're doing better. - *Teacher*

Now, in our fifth year, we need more central office people to work with the cluster staff on curriculum, instruction, and staff development. - *Cluster administrator*

CHICAGO: It would be helpful to have an open meeting with central office staff. [The City Hall] administration came to a few schools and answered questions the schools had, listened to questions and concerns. It's about having an open dialogue, and central office should do more of that. We want to talk with them about building repair needs and building a safe environment. - *Teacher*

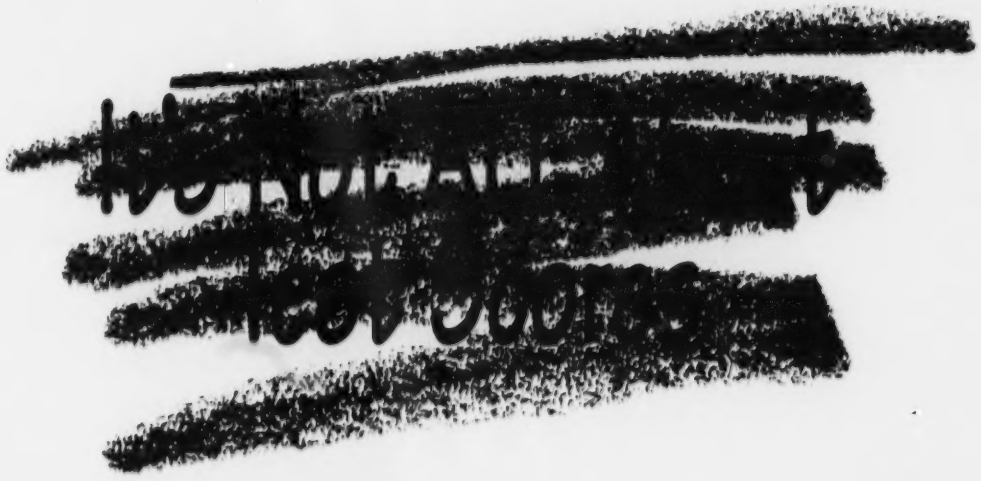
The central office should develop a mindset to service and support schools. Schools should have resources for curriculum development, problem-solving. That is not the mentality there yet – our calls aren't always returned. The School-Community relations department must have people who have experience working in schools as administrators so they can work with us productively. And who have expertise in negotiating personal and competing agendas that are not to the benefit of children. - *Principal*

We need resources in program development and evaluation. Maybe we should stop focusing on governance and start focusing on school improvement. Sometimes the student learning and improving schools gets lost in the governance. Get past governance and move on to real strategies for schools to improve and help students. Once you have a governance structure that works, we need support to focus on students and their learning. You can't expect children to have empathy and work positively together if the adults don't. - *Principal*

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

The Council of Great City Schools' Web site:
www.cgcs.org

NCREL's Urban Monographs:
www.ncrel.org



Schools and Communities Working Together to Increase Student Achievement

By Robin LaSota

Violence. Gangs. Poverty. Drugs and alcohol. Abusive relationships. Inadequate health care. Teen parents. Low self-esteem. Welfare dependency. All too often, these are the images we associate with urban youth.

The inner city contains many forces working against young people and many challenges to building their future. But as educators we can meet these challenges by tapping into the resources and strengths found in these same urban neighborhoods.

We can begin by moving beyond a view of young people as problems to be fixed and focus on *youth development.* This approach helps young people achieve in all areas of life – not just on standardized tests – by cultivating leadership among young people, raising their academic achievement, improving children's health and social well-being, educating teen mothers and helping them care for their children, and providing positive alternatives to gangs, crime, and alcohol and drugs.

"The school is not just about building academic skills," says youth development researcher Karen Pittman. "It's really about building the four 'Cs': competence, confidence, connectedness, and character."

Pittman outlines six competency areas to be developed in youth: physical health, mental health, social and cultural skills, cognitive and creative ability, academic achievement, and vocational skills. In order to achieve these competencies, youth must also have their basic needs met: safety, self-worth, mastery and confidence, independence, closeness, and self-awareness/spirituality. School reform strategies that develop these strengths include schools-within-schools, class size reduction, team teaching, school-to-work programs, service learning, and character education.

Schools can employ a variety of strategies to support student development. One strategy is to create partnerships between schools and youth development organizations. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) sponsors the Options for Pre-Teens (OPT) initiative in Norfolk, Virginia; Oakland, California; and Pontiac, Michigan. OPT works with young adolescents in grades four through eight. Components of the program include family involvement efforts, academic skill building, counseling and case management, sexuality education and life planning, and developing a positive school climate. Evaluation shows statistically significant differences between OPT schools and comparison schools in three areas: school climate, student behavior, and student knowledge, attitudes, and skills. OPT schools also demonstrate increased student achievement, higher educational expectations, stronger refusal skills, and greater family involvement.

These programs become even more powerful when they are part of a communitywide reform effort. The Beacons initiative in New York City operates 40 full-time after-school, evening, and weekend community centers at schools in each local school district. Local community-based organizations operate the Beacons, working closely with neighborhood youth, parents, older community residents, school personnel, and neighborhood service providers. Collaboration between schools and youth organizations allows the schools to develop recreational, social, emotional, leadership, and citizenship skills. "Very often when youth organizations use school space, they cohabitate, but they don't really collaborate," explains Pittman. "The Beacons really bridge that gap, so that youth services organizations understand what it's like to be in a classroom, and teachers understand the opportunities and challenges of being in a more unstructured setting."

Yet another powerful approach to youth development is used at El Puente, which is both a school and a community-based organization. Luis Garden Acosta founded El Puente to build a bridge to safety, development, and empowerment for Hispanic students in the Williamsburg community of Brooklyn, New York. The year-round school, called the Academy for Peace and Justice, is an integral part of El Puente. The Academy is one of New York City's 35 small, theme-based New Vision schools. At the Academy, 130 9th- through 12th-grade students take classes in math, English, social sciences, language, and science. Teams of students create community development projects promoting peace and social justice using their community as a classroom and the classroom as their community. For example, the students used their math and science skills to measure toxic chemicals in the local environment and made a documentary video on the dangers of a proposed community-based incinerator.

School-community collaboration allows students to develop social, emotional, leadership and citizenship skills.

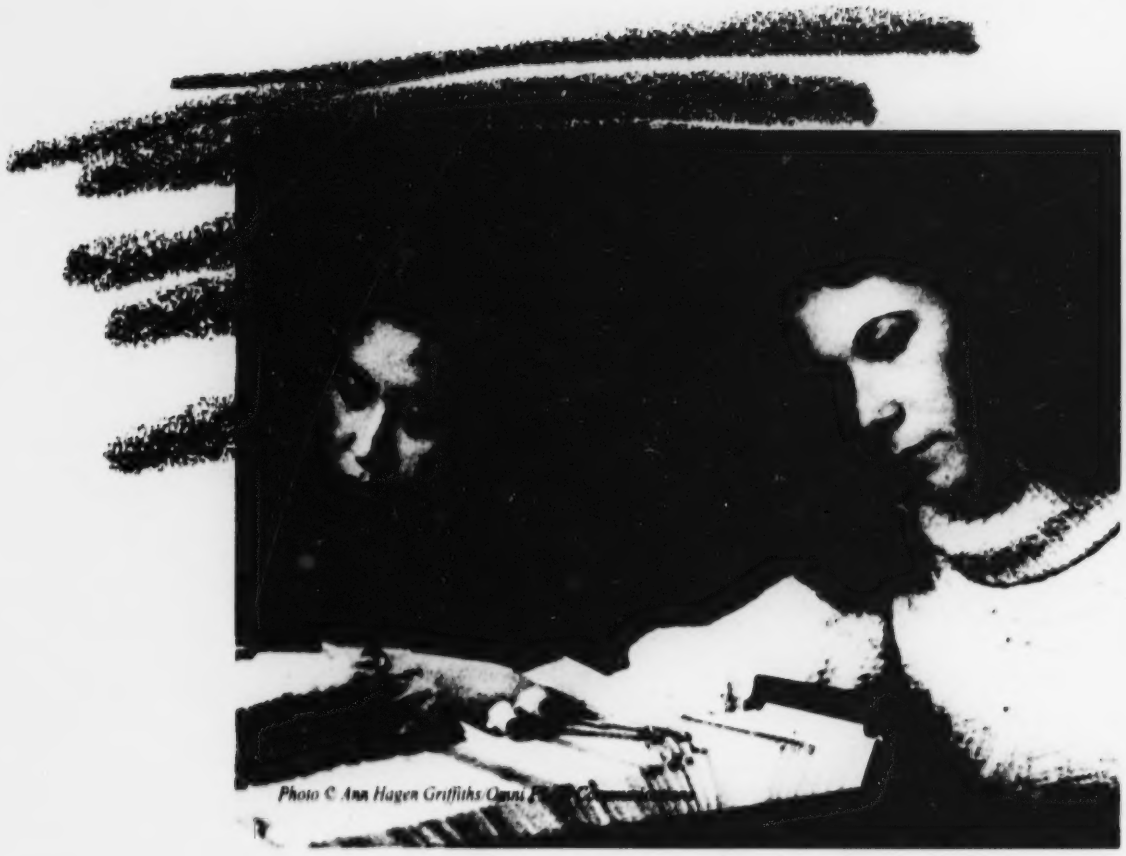


Photo © Ann Hagen Griffiths Omni

After-school and Saturday tutoring helps students pass the Regents exams, and interdisciplinary teaching is used to reach curricular goals. The *New York Times* reported that after the school's first 18 months the students outscored their counterparts in other schools on basic measures of reading and mathematics.

This year, the school will move to a new facility and will house seventh and eighth graders, a day care center, a community library and technology center, and a family health center. "Youth development cannot be separated from community development," explains Principal Francis Lucerna, "and the goal must be self-determination." A case study of El Puente conducted by Sharon Ramirez and Tom Dewar for the Kettering Foundation found that parents value the small school size, the safe and caring environment, the amount of individual attention and tutoring, and the open communication between staff and parents maintained through frequent phone calls and home visits.

School-linked, integrated services offer another strategy for urban youth. Schools make use of community resources to provide services such as health care, immunization, family counseling, adult education, and child care to ensure that students are physically and emotionally ready to learn. But Pittman warns that such programs often focus on problem-free youth rather than fully-prepared youth. "When schools and communities are challenged to think development, they develop long-term plans with their own children in mind," Pittman explains. "When they are asked to think problem prevention, they develop short-term programs for other people's children."

When programs work to develop youth *potential* rather than prevent youth *problems*, says Pittman, they tend to:

- Focus on opportunities and supports for students
- Challenge stereotypes about "high-risk" youth
- Emphasize commitment to all young people, not just students in the mainstream

- Cultivate long-term strategies to boost overall development

Research shows that school-linked, integrated services can have a positive impact. An evaluation of California's Healthy Start initiative found that the program improved delivery of critical goods and services such as food, clothing, child care, legal assistance, and health and dental care. Student grades and emotional health also improved, while teen risk behaviors declined.

Working at the community level is often difficult for schools. Educators may consider integrated services and neighborhood revitalization to be someone else's job. Yet schools must harness resources and strengths from throughout the community to improve education, health, employment, and family/social life over the long-term. Yale University researcher James Coleman and University of Wisconsin researcher Gary Wehlage write that working at the community level builds "social capital" – the capacity of individuals and institutions in a community to work together, trust one another, and form relationships to achieve common goals. These efforts typically include strengthening parent involvement to boost students' academic growth and involving parents and community members in school decision making.

Northwestern University researchers John McKnight and John Kretzmann have identified strategies used in two Chicago schools that benefit both the school and community:

- A dropout prevention program enables one school to be open three nights a week, providing space to community groups. The local alderman holds political rallies in the auditorium, and an art group has been formed to help students and community residents develop their artistic abilities.
- Principals from neighborhood schools organize a Family and Community Development Council, whose members come from community organizations, businesses, churches, social service agencies, and schools. They tackle issues that reach far beyond educational reform, such as helping the local Neighborhood Housing Services Organization develop affordable housing.
- A school for teen mothers started an infant boutique that provides useful products for the community and generates a cash flow for the students. The principal received a special grant to buy infant car seats to be sold along with infant clothes and other baby equipment. The students are designing and printing a brochure on car seat safety to be distributed in Chicago.

Implementing comprehensive, community-based strategies for youth development is certainly not an easy task, but the rewards are clear. By making use of the strengths found in the community, the school becomes more than an educational institution. It becomes a rich collection of resources that enhance the social and economic capital of the entire community and raise the level of achievement of poor, urban youth.

Robin LaSota is a program associate with the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL), who writes about community development and school-community collaboration.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

Pathways' Critical Issues on Integrated Services and School-to-Work:

www.ncrel.org/pathways

The Corporation for National Service's Learn and Serve America program:

www.cns.gov

International Youth Foundation (Karen Pittman):

www.iyfnet.org

WOLVERINES
36

Successful Strategies for Schools Serving At-Risk Children

An Interview with Dr. Samuel Stringfield

By Glibel Gomez and Heidi Hulse Mickelson

The Special Strategies study followed 10 programs that appeared to have unusually promising histories of effectiveness as well as programs that figured prominently in national school reform efforts.

1. Comer School Development Program
2. Success for All
3. Paideia
4. Coalition of Essential Schools
5. Re: Learning
6. Reading Recovery
7. METRA/Peer Tutoring
8. Computer-assisted instruction laboratories
9. Extended school year and extended school day programs
10. Chapter 1 schoolwide improvement programs

For every problem that urban schools face, there seems to be a corresponding intervention program that claims to improve student achievement and school productivity. Traditionally, these programs have targeted particular subject areas or student populations but, more recently, whole-school programs have become popular choices for urban schools under pressure to raise student performance.

Over the past three years, Dr. Samuel Stringfield, Program Director of the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University, led a research team in conducting a longitudinal study of programs for at-risk students. This study, *Urban and Suburban Rural Special Strategies for Educating Disadvantaged Children* (http://scov.csos.jhu.edu/specialstrategies/index.htm), looked at ten intervention and reform programs being used in 25 schools serving disadvantaged children. The U.S. Department of Education commissioned the study to accomplish three goals: (1) find the most effective intervention programs, (2) compare their characteristics, and (3) determine whether they can be used in other schools.

THE FINDINGS

Adapted from Urban and Suburban/Rural Special Strategies for Educating Disadvantaged Children, 1997

Finding #1: America's students who have been placed at risk of academic failure are capable of achieving at levels that meet and even exceed current national averages. The ability of disadvantaged students to achieve academically was clearly demonstrated at some of the *Special Strategies* sites.

Finding #2: Each of the programs studied in *Special Strategies* offered clear strengths, yet even when visiting sites that were multiply nominated as exemplars, we often found great variance in both implementation levels and effects. Two major factors that contribute to a program's success are its match with the school and how well the school staff implement the program design. Strong principal and teacher support means high-level implementation, which makes a difference in student achievement.

Finding # 3: The school should be committed to implementing a program for the long term (at least five years) and to institutionalizing reforms. A careful self-assessment must address multiple problems and identify potential obstacles within the school's leadership and faculty, the school district and board, and the community. Intervention programs handed down from the district or board were the least successful, while the most successful programs were chosen by the principal and faculty after researching diverse program options. The school should provide intense and ongoing training, offer annual staff development, mandate continuous new staff training, and require contact with a regional support team.

Finding #4: In general, better results were achieved by whole-school reforms rather than pull-out programs; programs that concentrate on the early grades, rather than programs that spread resources evenly over the elementary grades or in secondary schools; and externally developed programs rather than locally developed programs. None of the secondary schools achieved stable implementation across the full school, and, perhaps as a result, none produced a pattern of achievement gains.

Dr. Stringfield spoke with *CITYSCHOOLS* about the study's major findings (see pp. 36-37) and their implications for reform in urban schools.

Has this study changed your perception of a successful intervention program?

Yes. Now I think that the district and school board have a role to play in any successful school reform program. Their role is to provide the structure that will enable the school to reach its goals and for teachers to do their jobs effectively. Teachers are doing the best they can. But it is too much to expect them to come up with new programs and new curricula in addition to working their full-time jobs.

How can urban schools find a good intervention program?

First, before considering any programs, the school has to conduct a frank self-assessment. The principal and teachers must be honest with themselves to find their strengths and weaknesses. There are many good self-assessment models available.

Next, the school has to look at diverse intervention programs to find a design that will give them what they need. Two schools can adopt the same program but have different results. The most important thing is to match the program to the school. Good background research is really important in determining success.

How much support is needed in the school for a successful reform program, and what should be done to convince naysayers?

Schools need buy-in from a "super-majority" of school stakeholders – 70 to 90 percent. Not everyone will agree to a new program. Teachers who have been in the school a long time are often skeptical. And they should be, because an intervention program should have to prove itself. But if a program is the right one for the school, if it does make a difference in student learning, the naysayers will come around. They may fear change, but they won't be against improving things for the kids. The report also talks about how to help the committed naysayers "transfer with dignity."

How should an inner-city teacher start an effective intervention program?

Get information on self-assessment or intervention designs to your principal or talk to the Title I director about using Title I to create whole-school change. The report found that whole-school interventions work best.

Is there a correlation between parent involvement and program success?

Yes, there's a strong correlation. Parent involvement is especially important during the primary grades. Among the programs we looked at, the Comer School Development program, Success for All, and locally developed schoolwide programs in urban schools had the most active outreach programs.

But any school can start a parent outreach program. I suggest using whatever means available to get parents involved.

One strategy to get parents involved is to impress them with a colorful computer presentation, which will get them to come back to the school. Or if a kid can say, "Come to the school meeting and I'll show you what I did on the computer," that will get parents to come to the meeting.

I also suggest educators contact the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships (http://scov.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm) and the National Network of Partnership Schools (http://scov.csos.jhu.edu/p2000) here at Johns Hopkins.

Glibel Gomez is a Chicago-based freelance writer; Heidi Hulse Mickelson is a teacher and educational researcher in Chicago.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

NCREL's Comprehensive School Reform Resource site:
www.ncrel.org/csri

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's catalog of school reform models:
www.nwrel.org/scpd/natspec/catalog

Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success
www.temple.edu/departments/LSS

Finding #5: A series of findings regarding classroom activities across virtually all of the programs was, in one sense, distressing. Extensive observations of class periods and students' whole school days provided a picture of instruction driven by management issues, of very uneven access to subjects beyond reading/language arts and mathematics, and of reforms often stifled by seemingly straightforward issues, such as scheduling. Elementary students had access to the core subjects of reading/language arts and mathematics, but access to subjects such as science, social studies, computers, and writing was uneven.

Finding #6: The challenges faced by *Special Strategies* schools attempting to educate large numbers of students at risk were often enormous. External sociological factors beyond the control of administrators and faculty and beyond the scope of any intervention program influence learning in the classroom, but resources for addressing these factors are often in short supply.

Finding #7: Many schools used federal compensatory education funds to create or adopt, and then sustain, new programs they often could not have considered otherwise. In the hands of instructionally focused, creative educational administrators and teachers, Chapter 1 became the primary engine for reform in otherwise distressed schools.

Finding #8: Most of the programs studied in *Special Strategies* are continuing to evolve and expand. These systematic self-improvements bode well for the future of school reform.

The full Special Strategies report is available on the Internet at http://scov.csos.jhu.edu/specialstrategies/index.htm or by calling 1-800-USA-LEARN

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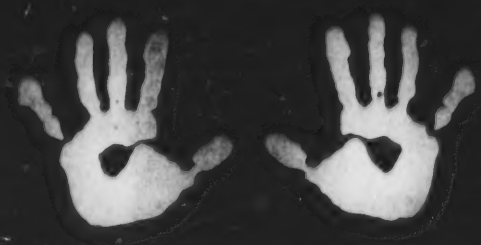

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